

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

21 March 1949

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM NO. 147

SUBJECT: Obstacles to Early Formation of a Western Trade Union Federation

The withdrawal of the British, US, and Dutch national labor organizations* from the World Federation of Trade Unions, in protest against Communist domination of that body, has ended the period of uneasy world labor unity and is intensifying the conflict between Communist and non-Communist labor for the control of the world's labor forces. The contest between the seceding Western labor groups and the Soviet-reconstituted WFTU will probably broaden during 1949 into a global struggle in which a new world labor federation will vie with the WFTU for the allegiance of unaffiliated labor organizations and the unorganized labor of the underdeveloped areas. The ability of the Western labor groups to establish such a federation promptly, rather than after long months of negotiation, hinges on their willingness to resolve major differences now dividing them. Among these

* The British TUC, the CIO, and the Netherlands NVV.

Note: This paper has been coordinated at the working-level with the Intelligence Organization of the Department of State.

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are: (a) the inability of the AFL and the CIO to agree on a common position with regard to participation in a new federation; (b) the reluctance of the British TUC to accept the concept of a strong centralized world federation; (c) the failure of the Western labor organizations to give adequate and prompt recognition to anti-Communist labor in the underdeveloped areas. While these differences persist, the other non-Communist national organizations (the Swiss and Scandinavian unions especially) will probably remain unwilling to commit themselves to a definite course of action. Resolution of the differences is becoming more urgent as the WFTU presses its drive to influence and organize a greater segment of world labor. A prolonged failure of the British, Dutch, and US labor organizations to reach a solution would give the USSR a substantial advantage in the struggle for control of world labor forces.

1. The International Labor Situation Following the Split in the WFTU.

The immediate effect upon the WFTU of the withdrawal of the major Western labor organizations in January 1949 has been sharply reduced representation for non-Communist labor and virtually complete Communist control of the federation. The reduction in the strength of its non-Communist labor elements has removed any effective restraint on Soviet use of the federation to implement its foreign policy

aims. So long as the national unions of the three Western powers remained in the federation, Soviet exploitation of the WFTU was tempered by the Kremlin's disinclination to take any step which might drive them from the federation, and thereby undermine its claim to be the only comprehensive and genuinely representative international workers' organization. Similarly, prior to the departure of the CIO, the British TUC, and the Netherlands NVV, Soviet influence within the federation was for the most part limited to use of the WFTU Secretariat and of other WFTU organs for the dissemination of Soviet propaganda against the Western Powers. Since the break, however, vacancies on WFTU governing bodies left by the Western representatives have been filled almost exclusively with Communists. This restaffing has transformed the WFTU from a propaganda instrument into a relatively smooth-running mechanism for Soviet penetration of unorganized labor, especially in the colonial and underdeveloped areas, and has facilitated the launching of a drive to extend Communist control of the world's labor forces.

To cope with this Soviet challenge, representatives of the three seceding Western labor organizations have consulted with trade union leaders from other European Recovery Program countries in an effort to organize a united Western labor front. At a secret January meeting

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in Bern, representatives from the fifteen nations participating in the ERP Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) decided to canvass the reactions of all non-Communist labor organizations to the split and, on the basis of their reactions, to prepare the ground for a new labor international capable of acting vigorously against Communist offensives in any area. The French (Force Ouvrière) and Italian (LCGIL) representatives urged that a constitutional conference to set up such an international be held as soon as possible. Opposition to prompt action was voiced by the Australian, Scandinavian and Swiss trade unionists who made clear that they would not be committed until their national organizations had had an opportunity to deal with the question.

2. Current Obstacles to Early Formation of a New World Labor Federation.

Resolution of the disagreements which are impeding the organization of a Western-oriented labor federation has become urgent as a result of the demonstrated determination of the WFTU to expand Communist control over the world's labor forces before the Western trade unionists can organize. The obstacles to such agreement, stemming partly from differences revealed at the Bern Conference and partly from conditions existing previously, include:

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a. the inability of the AFL and the CIO to agree on the terms of US representation in a new labor federation and on a common international labor program. The AFL, which stayed out of the WFTU because of opposition to any form of cooperation with Soviet labor unions, is now vigorously backing early formation of a new world labor organization capable of coping with the aggressive tactics of Communist labor. Although it has repeatedly attacked delays in the formation of such an organization, AFL insistence on recognition as the "dominant" US labor movement has seriously impeded progress toward the common objective. Its refusal to accept Walter Schevenels, veteran Belgian trade unionist and former WFTU Assistant-Secretary General, as Secretary of the ERP Trade Union Advisory Committee has further embarrassed the efforts of the other Western trade union leaders to proceed with plans for the new world organization.*

The importance attached to these AFL-CIO differences by the other Western labor organizations is reflected in recent statements by the

* Although the AFL has indicated that it opposed Schevenels because he was "politically unreliable," his consistently pro-Western record does not substantiate this charge. The AFL opposition to him more probably reflects: (1) its desire to see its own candidate, Oldenbroek, selected; (2) its knowledge that Schevenels is reported to distrust the AFL.

Swiss and Scandinavian unions indicating that they will withhold support from the new international until such differences are resolved. While these non-Communist labor organizations will probably withdraw from the WFTU during 1949, they are uncommitted to any new federation. Should the new organization seem to offer insufficient protection, they might prefer to adopt a neutral position.

b. the reluctance of the British TUC to accept the concept of a strong centralized world federation. This cautious attitude which reflects the traditional preference of British labor for semi-autonomous national unions, its distaste for the use of a labor organization for political ends, and its disillusionment with the dictatorial tactics of the WFTU Secretariat, has only gradually given way to an understanding of the need for Western labor to organize rapidly against the WFTU. The TUC's hesitancy is further reflected in its opposition to direct representation for the International Trade Secretariats in the Trade Union Advisory Committee. The British contend that these secretariats (the International Metal Workers, Transport Workers, etc.) should be represented through the national delegations on the TUAC. Recently, however, impressed with the urgency of the situation, the TUC leaders have called for an end to the AFL-CIO schism and have

expressed hope for a preliminary conference of the interested national federations no later than June 1949. They remain unwilling to engage in a lengthy international labor conference while the AFL and CIO are still at loggerheads. Meanwhile, the balance of power which the TUC holds in the TUAC ensures a more certain influence for British labor than would its still undetermined position in a new world federation.

c. inadequate recognition by the Western labor organizations of anti-Communist labor in the underdeveloped areas. At the Bern Conference of the TUAC, the Australian representative charged representatives from the industrialized countries with slighting the interests of labor in the underdeveloped areas. So long as the Advisory Committee limited itself to OEEC problems, consultation with labor representatives from the underdeveloped areas was not required. Once the Committee began to plan for a new international, however, consultation with regional labor groups (like the Latin American Inter-American Confederation of Labor and the Asian Federation of Labor) became necessary in order to ensure that the new international would be broadly based. Integration of the Asian labor elements into a regional federation has been impeded by the unwillingness of British labor to

support a federation sponsored by the Nehru-controlled Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC). The UK labor leaders are not yet convinced that the INTUC is a free trade union movement and are reluctant to countenance any form of cooperation with it. Organization of the Asian Labor Federation is further handicapped by the continued absence of close liaison between the US labor organizations and the non-Communist labor organizations of India, China, and Japan -- areas in which Soviet labor and the WFTU are currently conducting organization drives.

3. Consequences of Continued Failure to Form a New World Labor Organization.

The withdrawal of the three major Western trade unions from the WFTU (others are expected to follow them shortly) has left the Communist hard-core leadership in complete control of that body and has converted it into an organization rapidly approaching ideological homogeneity. The chief consequences of a prolonged failure of the Western labor groups to resolve the disagreements blocking the formation of a new world labor organization would probably be continued division of the Western labor forces, leaving them without effective machinery for challenging the Communist labor drive; and increasing gains by the Soviet-reorganized WFTU in its efforts to extend Communist influence over world labor reserves, particularly in the underdeveloped areas.

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The net effect of prolonged failure of the British, US, and Dutch national labor organizations to settle their differences promptly and decisively would be to give the USSR a substantial advantage in the East-West struggle for control of world labor.

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